DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 565 CS 011 172

AUTHOR Manning, Maryann; And Others
TITLE Kindergarten Children from Different Socioeconomic Levels: Their Knowledge of Common Forms of Print.
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Knoxville, TN, November 11-13, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Family Environment; Kindergarten; *Kindergarten Children; *Knowledge Level; Primary Education; *Prior Learning; *Reading Habits; *Socioeconomic Status
IDENTIFIERS Emergent Literacy; *Print Awareness

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the knowledge kindergartners have constructed about the content and purpose of print in a variety of forms. It sought to identify their perceptions about literacy episodes that occur in the home, and to identify differences across socioeconomic levels. Subjects were 70 kindergarten children in or near a large Southern city, representing 16 urban poverty class (UP) children, 33 lower urban working class (UW) children, 10 suburban middle class (SM) children, and 11 suburban upper class (SU) children. Children were interviewed individually. Results showed that children from SU and SM backgrounds indicated they were read to more frequently than children from UP backgrounds, had greater familiarity with books, and had a better idea about book sources such as the public library. Children from SU backgrounds also reported that their parents liked to read, and they and their parents wrote more often at home than children from UP groups. The UP children knew a great deal about mail, and most children in the study were very aware of the newspaper. Therefore, teachers should use a variety of reading and writing activities related to mail and to the newspaper to make literacy connections between home and school. (Three tables of data are included, and an appendix of the interview questions is attached.) (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED353565

Kindergarten Children from Different Socioeconomic Levels: Their Knowledge of Common Forms of Print

Maryann Manning, Gary Manning, & Roberta Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Maryann Manning
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented at the 1992 Meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association
Knoxville, Tennessee

CS011172

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Kindergarten Children from Different Socioeconomic Levels: Their Knowledge of Common Forms of Print

Numerous authorities (Anrig, 1985; Boykin, 1984; Forbes, 1985; Froe, 1972; Shannon, 1985) identify social class as a determinant of the quality of education offered to students. Cardena and First (1985) suggest that fewer resources are allotted to schools in poor neighborhooods. According to Comer (1988), poor minority children are undereducated and fall well below the national average in academics.

In spite of the problem and the concern expressed by many, there has been little change in the types of reading instruction offered to low-income, minority students. It is estimated that a basal reader approach, based on a skills-oriented view of reading, is used in over ninety percent of all classrooms in the nation (Goodman, et. al., 1988; Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1988). In a skills-oriented reading class, much of the instructional time is spent practicing skills isolated from meaningful contexts. This approach has not been successful with many low-income, inner city students. An alternative to skills-based curriculum is a curriculum based on a whole language view of literacy development where authentic materials are used to aid children in becoming literate.

During a presentation at the 1990 Umbrella Whole Language Conference in St. Louis, Yetta Goodman stated that we must identify reading and writing activities in the lives of children

and build on these authentic experiences in literacy programs. Kenneth Goodman (1986, p. 31) emphasizes the importance of authenticity, and says, "They (children) need to own the process they use: to feel that the activities are their own, not just school work or stuff to please the teacher." A number of researchers (Dyson; 1982; Sulzby, 1985; Taylor, 1982) have shown that the home and community provide authentic reading and writing experiences such as writing letters, reading newspapers, and reading books for the sheer pleasure of it.

Gordon Wells (1986) stated that literacy activities at school should form a bridge to those literacy activities that are most common in the home. School should build on the communication competence that children have constructed before they enter school. In so doing, the school's literacy curriculum should be more meaningful and purposeful for all children.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge kindergartners have constructed about the content and purpose of print in a variety of forms and to identify their perceptions about literacy episodes that occur in the home. The researchers were particularly interested in differences across socioeconomic levels and the implications for schooling.

Subjects

The population for the study consisted of 70 kindergarten children representing 16 urban poverty class (UP) children, 33 lower urban working class (UW) children, 10 suburban middle class (SM) children, and 11 suburban upper class (SU) children. There

were 32 girls and 38 boys in the study. One-half of the UP and UW children were African American and the others were European American. All children lived in or near a large Southern city, and were enrolled in kindergarten for the first time.

The children's social class was determined by consulting with UAB sociologists Ferris Ritchey and Kevin Fitzpatrick. They suggested the use of family income, free lunch data, and the occupation of the parents to determine the appropriate social class. This information was provided by the school in which the children were enrolled. In addition, Ritchey and Fitzpatrick suggested the labels for the four classifications.

The UP, UW, and SM children attended public schools. The SU children attended a private school where the annual tuition exceeded the income of many of the urban poverty class families.

Procedures

All children were interviewed individually in the corridor outside their classrooms. The interview (See Appendix A) consisted of several questions in order to determine: (1) their notions about reading and writing; (2) who they knew who read and wrote specific types of text; (3) their ability to recognize common forms of print; and (4) their ideas regarding information in different forms of print. The interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes depending on the number of details given by the children. The responses of the children were categorized and compared.

Results

All of the UW, SM, and SU children reported reading books at home. Of the UW children, 90.9% (30) said they read at home and 60% (20) of them said they read books. In contrast, 62.5% (10) of the UP children reported that they read at home and 43.4% (7) said that they read books.

Of the SU children, 54.5% (6) identified the public library as a source for books. None of the UP children identified the public library and only 20.0% (20) of the SM children referred to the library. At the same time, only 15.2% (5) of the UW children indicated the use of a library. A bookstore and "the store" were viewed as sources of books by 54.5% (6) of the SU children, but, as can be noted in Table 1, only a small percentage of children in the other three groups gave a similar response.

A large number of children from the SU, SM, and UW groups indicated that their mothers liked to read. However, only 25.0% (4) of the UP children said their mothers liked to read. Fewer SU, SM, and UW children said that their fathers liked to read: 63.6%, 50.0%, and 45.5% respectively. Only 6.3% (1) of the UP children referred to their father. As can be noted in Table 1, one-half or more of all the children indicated that their parents read children's books to them. There is a big difference, however, between the responses about their parents reading adult books. For example, 72.7% of the SU children indicated that their parents read adult books, while only 6.3% (1) of the UP children reported that parents read adult books.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be noted in Table 2, a majority of children in all groups reported that they write at home. When asked specifically what they write, most could not articulate what they write. There was a big difference between the responses of the SU children and the other three groups. For example, 45.5% (5) of the SU children said they wrote letters, whereas only 20.0% of the SM children, 15.2% (5) of the UW children, and 12.5% (2) of the UP children reported that they wrote letters.

Children in all four groups reported that they saw their mothers, fathers, and siblings writing in the home. There was a great deal of variance, however, between the four groups. For instance, 90.95% (10) of the SU children indicated that their mothers wrote at home, while only 43.8% (7) of the UP children gave a similar response. Accordingly, there was variance in the responses of the children in the four groups concerning what their parents write. While 45.5% (5) of the SU children said their parents wrote letters, only 25.0% (4) of the UP children mentioned letters.

Insert Table 2 about here

Magazines were recognized by many of the children, but there was a considerable variance in responses between the groups. All

of the SU children called a magazine a magazine, whereas only 43.8% (7) of the UP children did so. Table 3 shows that the UP children compare favorably to children in the other three groups in their ability to recognize bills or letters that arrive in the mail. At the same time, UP children have a good understanding about mail boxes and mail delivery.

It's interesting to note that almost all of the children recognized the newspaper. All of the SU children recognized the newspaper, and 93.7% (15) of the UP children recognized it.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

In this study, children from SU and SM backgrounds indicate that they are read to more frequently than children from UP backgrounds. They indicate greater familiarty with books and have a better idea about book sources such as the public library. As might be expected, children from SU backgrounds report that their parents like to read. Children who are read to and have parents as reading models will usually experience greater success in reading development, therefore, it is very important that teachers of UP children frequently read aloud to them. At the same time, more effort needs to be made in order to help UP parents realize the importance of reading aloud to their children and, if they can't read, encourage them to take their children to

story hour at their community library and find others in the neighborhood who will read to their children.

According to the self-reports of the children, children from SU backgrounds and their parents write more often at home than children from UP groups. It's important for early childhood programs to emphasize writing for all children and especially for UP children. In addition to providing many opportunities for children to write independently, teachers need to demonstrate functional and purposeful writing throughout the day.

The UP children in this study knew a great deal about mail; they showed understanding about getting mail, the delivery of mail, and what arrives in the mail. Teachers should use a variety of reading and writing activities related to mail such as letter writing and engaging children in the sending and receiving of mail through a classroom post office. In so doing, they will be emphasizing literacy activities that should form a bridge between home and school literacy activities.

All children have constructed knowledge about print before they enter school. It is imperative that teachers understand the experiences with literacy that young children bring to school in order to build on those experiences in fostering the literacy development of young children. Most children in this study, for example, were very aware of the newspaper. Therefore, teachers of these children should definitely use this form of print to make literacy connections between home and school. They might talk about the news in the paper, have a daily classroom news

activity, and develop a weekly classroom newspaper to send home. In bridging the experiences of the home with those of the school by using authentic materials and activities, teachers will nurture their students' reading and writing development.

References

Anrig, G. R. (1985). Educational standarads, testing, and equity. Phi Delta Kappan, 66, 623-625.

Boykin, A. W. (1984). Reading achievement and the social-cultural frame of reference of Afro-American children. Journal of Negro Education, 53, 464-473.

Cardenas, J. & First, J. M. (1985). Children at risk. Educational Leadership, 53, 4-8.

Comer, J. (1988). Educating poor minority children. Scientific American, 259, 42-48.

Dyson, A. H. (1982). Reading, writing, and language: Young children solving the written language puzzle. Language Arts, 59, 829-839.

Forbes, R. E. (1985). Academic achievement of historically lower-achieving students during the seventies. Phi Delta Kappan, 66, 542-544.

Froe, O. D. (1972). Evaluating the achievement of the disadvantaged student. Journal of Negro Education, 41, 121-126.

Goodman, K. (1986). What's whole in whole language? Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Goodman, K., Smith, E. B., Meredith, R., & Goodman, Y. (1987). Language and thinking in school. (3rd. ed.). New York: Richard C. Owen.

Shannon, P. (1985). Reading instruction and social class. Language Arts, 62, 604-613.

Vacca, J., Vacca, R., & Gove, M. (1982). Reading and learning to read. Boston: Little, Brown.

Sulzby, E. (1985). Kindergartners as writers and readers. In Marcia Farr (Ed.) Advances in writing research, Volume One: Children's early writing development (pp. 219-233). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

to read. Boston: Little, Brown.

Taylor, D. (1983). Family literacy: Young children learning to read and write. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wells, G. (1986). The meaning makers: Children learning language and using language to learn. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Table 1

Reading Habits

Question	UP	UW	SM	SU
Do you read at home?				
Yes	62.5%	90.9%	100.0%	100.0%
What do you read?				
Books	43.7%	60.6%	100.0%	100.0%
Where does your family get what they read?				
Public Library	0.0%	15.2%	20.0%	54.5%
Home Collection	0.0%	12.1%	60.0%	100.0%
School	6.3%	9.1%	30.0%	9.1%
Bookstore/Store	12.5%	12.1%	10.0%	54.5%
Who likes to read in your home?				
Mother	25.0%	63.6%	80.0%	81.8%
Father	6.3%	45.5%	50.0%	63.6%
Siblings	50.0%	45.5%	30.0%	45.5%
What do they read?				
Children's Books	50.0%	60.6%	80.0%	63.6%
Adult Books	6.3%	27.3%	50.0%	72.7%
Newspapers	12.5%	33.3%	10.0%	54.5%
Magazines	6.3%	18.2%	0.0%	36.4%
Bible	18.8%	3.0%	10.0%	0.0%

Urban Poverty Class Group n = 16
Urban Working Class Group n = 33
Suburban Middle Class Group n = 10
Suburban Upper Class Group n = 11

Table 2
Writing Habits

Question	UP	UW	SM	SU
Do you write at home?				
Yes	81.2%	78.8%	100.0%	100.0%
What do you write?				
Letters	12.5%	15.2%	20.0%	45.5%
Stories	0.0%	9.1%	10.0%	18.2%
Books	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Journals	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Who else writes at home?				
Mother	43.8%	63.6%	60.0%	90.9%
Father	6.3%	42.4%	40.0%	90.9%
Siblings	18.8%	51.5%	40.0%	45.5%
What do they write?				
Letters	25.0%	18.2%	40.0%	45.5%
Notes	12.5%	18.2%	40.0%	54.5%
Business	0.0%	30.3%	30.0%	72.7%
Checks	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Cards	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Stories	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%
Phone Numbers	6.3%	3.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Lists	0.0%	12.1%	10.0%	0.0%
Homework	6.3%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%

Urban Poverty Class Group n = 16
Urban Working Class City Group n = 33
Surburban Middle Class Group n = 10
Suburban Upper Class Group n = 11

Table 3
Knowledge of Print Forms

Question	UP	UW	SM	SU
Recognizes Magazine	43.8%	78.8%	100.0%	100.0%
Do you know someone who reads this (magazine)?	0.0%	90.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Who reads this?				
Mother	18.8%	60.6%	50.0%	54.5%
Father	12.5%	27.3%	40.0%	27.3%
Recognizes bills/letters				
Mail	43.8%	51.5%	0.0%	18.2%
Envelopes	37.5%	24.2%	10.0%	54.5%
Bills	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Letters	0.0%	12.1%	70.0%	27.3%
Notes	6.3%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Checks	0.0%	3.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Where do you see these?				
Mail Box	68.8%	69.7%	80.0%	72.7%
Post Office	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	27.3%
How do they get there?				
Mailcarrier	62.5%	87.9%	60.0%	90.9%
What else comes in the _____(used child's word)?				
Letters	12.5%	18.2%	30.0%	54.5%
Cards	0.0%	21.2%	40.0%	18.2%
Bills	12.5%	24.2%	50.0%	9.1%
Checks	6.3%	6.1%	20.0%	0.0%
Magazines	6.3%	33.3%	40.0%	36.4%
Newspapers	0.0%	15.2%	20.0%	18.2%
Important Papers	6.3%	6.1%	0.0%	9.1%
Catalogs	6.3%	0.0%	20.20%	0.0%
Packages	0.0%	15.2%	10.0%	9.1%
Cereal	6.3%	12.1%	20.0%	9.1%

Table 3 (continued)

Recognizes Newspaper	93.7%	96.9%	100.0%	100.0%
Where do you see this?				
Yard	25.0%	54.5%	60.0%	81.8%
Newspaper box	31.3%	3.0%	10.0%	9.1%
Service station	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Newsboy with bag	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Machine	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Store	18.8%	12.1%	20.0%	0.0%
Post office	0.0%	9.1%	10.0%	0.0%
Mail box	0.0%	6.1%	0.0%	9.1%
Who reads one that you know?				
Mother	25.0%	45.5%	30.0%	63.6%
Father	37.5%	66.7%	70.0%	90.9%
Do you know what is in it?				
Crime stories	31.3%	6.1%	10.0%	45.0%
News	0.0%	18.2%	30.0%	0.0%
Pictures of people	6.3%	21.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Deaths	6.3%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Advertisements	6.3%	3.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Words	0.0%	21.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Comics	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Stock markets	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%

Urban Poverty Class Group n = 16
Urban Working Class Group n = 33
Suburban Middle Class Group n = 10
Suburban Upper Class Group n = 11

Appendix A

Questions Related to Reading

Do you read at home?
What do you read?
Who likes to read in your home?
What do they like to read?
Where does your family get what they read?

Identification of Print

The following forms of print and questions were presented to the child:

Magazine: What is this?
Do you know anyone who reads something like this?
Who reads it?

Bills: What are these?
Where do you see these?
If the child says "mailbox," he/she is asked the following:
How do they get there?
If the child says "mail, mail box, or mailman, post office," the following is asked:
What else comes in the _____? or What else comes from the _____?

Newspaper: What is this?
Where do you see this?
Who reads one that you know?
Do you know what is in it?

Questions Related to Writing

Do you write at home?
What do you write?
Who else writes at home?
What do they write?